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Gabon

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Contents

		Page
I.	Methodology	3
II.	National monitoring and consultation process	3
	A. Consultations with the legislative branch	3
	B. Consultations with national human rights institutions and civil society	3
III.	Implementation of the recommendations from the previous cycle	3
	A. Ratification of international legal instruments	3
	B. Integration of human rights into national legislation	4
	C. Trafficking in persons	4
	D. A-status accreditation and functioning of the National Human Rights Commission	5
	E. Collaboration between civil society and government institutions	5
	F. Awareness-raising activities	6
	G. Cooperation between Gabon and the agencies of the United Nations system	6
	H. Torture	7
	I. Corporal punishment	7
	J. Right to health	8
	K. Right to education	10
	L. Poverty	11
	M. Training of the defence and security forces	13
	N. Women's rights	13
	O. Birth certificates	14
	P. Ritual crimes	15
	Q. Conditions of detention	15
	R. Juvenile justice	15
	S. Trafficking in persons	16
	T. Rights of persons with disabilities	16
	U. Freedom of the press and expression	17
	V. Rights of minorities	18
	W. Assessment and outlook	18

I. Methodology

1. The preparation of this report for the universal periodic review was based on, first and foremost, the 105 recommendations made to Gabon in 2012, on the surveys undertaken to collect data for the implementation of each of the recommendations and, lastly, on a national meeting leading up to the adoption of the report to take stock of the information gathered and agree on a way forward. Coordinated by the National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports, established pursuant to Decree No. 000102/PR/MDHLCCLCI of 15 January 2007, the approach taken to establish the report was participatory and inclusive. Some of the recommendations resembling one another were grouped together on purpose with a view to providing the most relevant replies possible.

II. National monitoring and consultation process

2. The Directorate General for Human Rights in charge of coordinating the national monitoring process relied on the National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports, civil society and parliamentary commissions responsible for human rights of the National Assembly and Senate for the preparation of this report.

A. Consultations with the legislative branch

3. Two awareness seminars were organized by the Directorate for members of the parliamentary commissions responsible for human rights of the National Assembly and Senate. The seminars were intended to familiarize parliamentarians with the universal periodic review and to remind them of the measures to be taken to contribute towards the implementation of the recommendations made to Gabon in 2012.

B. Consultations with national human rights institutions and civil society

4. Between December 2016 and June 2017, the Directorate General for Human Rights, along with the National Human Rights Commission, held preparatory meetings and working sessions with the government institutions and segments of civil society involved in the recommendations made to Gabon in 2012. A draft integrating the data provided by different actors was originally drawn up by the Directorate General before being submitted for a national review, which served to improve it. The improved draft was then adopted by all these stakeholders. The report thus reflects the assessments of public officials and civil society actors. It concludes with some observations and a non-exhaustive list of policies that are of importance to the Government of Gabon.

III. Implementation of the recommendations from the previous cycle

A. Ratification of international legal instruments

Full implementation of the recommendations

5. On 2 April 2014, Gabon ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. On 1 July 2014, it ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Recommendation in the process of implementation

6. Gabon is making arrangements for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

B. Integration of human rights into national legislation

Domestic violence

Full implementation of the recommendations

7. The law makes provisions against domestic violence and rape under Act No. 21/63 establishing the Criminal Code and Act No. 38/2008 of 29 January 2009 on preventing and combating female genital mutilation. Book III of the law on crimes and lesser offences against persons provides for penalties for various forms of domestic violence, in particular, in chapter II, articles 230, 231, 232 et seq., and in chapter VIII, articles 264, 265 and 266. In addition, the act of rape is criminalized under article 256 of chapter VII.

Partial implementation of recommendations

8. A bill to amend the Criminal Code that introduces penalties for domestic violence and trafficking in persons is before the parliament.

C. Trafficking in persons

Full implementation of the recommendations

9. An interministerial commission was established in 2014 to align Act No. 9/2004 of 21 September 2005 on preventing and combating trafficking in children in Gabon with international standards. As regards assistance to victims of trafficking, psychologists, social workers and police officers ensure that children are provided with administrative, psychosocial, legal support and rehabilitation services in appropriate settings such as the Centre for Children in Difficult Circumstances in Angondjé. Technical work has been done to incorporate a definition of trafficking in persons into the law, by which victims are afforded greater protections and assistance for their integration. Concerning efforts to raise awareness and build the capacity of entities involved in the protection of children, young people and the population against human trafficking, the National Committee to Monitor the Fight against Child Trafficking and the Directorate General for Human Rights have regularly organized events for the promotion and protection of the rights of children with a view to deterring the perpetrators of this scourge. The Children's Code, covering all aspects of children's lives, was adopted by the Council of Ministers in October 2016 and is now under consideration by the Council of State.

Partial implementation of recommendations

10. The procedure to amend the national legislation on trafficking in persons has been under way since 2013, following the visit of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons in May 2012, in order to bring it into conformity with international human rights law. The amended bill concerning Act No. 9/2004 on the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol), which makes trafficking in persons a criminal offence while providing for measures of protection and assistance for victims, is at the final stage of adoption. A bill on the incorporation of a definition of trafficking in persons, by which victims are afforded greater protections and assistance, has been transmitted to the President.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

11. The Children's Code is expected to become law, on an equal footing with the Criminal Code and the Civil Code. It will close the gaps in the legislation involving the definition of the child, early marriage and gender-based violence. Its promulgation will

enable the Government to protect children against any phenomenon affecting their lives, survival and development.

D. A-status accreditation and functioning of the National Human Rights Commission

Functioning

Full implementation of the recommendations

12. The Commission works with the police and gendarmerie services to monitor conditions of confinement and police custody. It also organizes visits to the central prison and frequent meetings with the department of the Ministry of Justice responsible for human rights, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union and others. Such activities point the way towards partnerships in sectors that deal with social issues. Between 2012 and 2016, several workshops for its members were organized with the collaboration of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. On 4 and 5 February 2014, some 30 members of the National Human Rights Commission participated in a capacity-building seminar on techniques for the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights. The participants learned about the region's regulatory and institutional framework, States' obligations, the role of national human rights institutions and the requirements for the effective implementation of a mandate to promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights. Furthermore, a workshop was held that resulted in the development of a road map for reforming the Commission. The implementation of this road map has led, since December 2016, to the rewriting of the decree on the establishment and organization of the Commission in collaboration with the Council of State.

A-status accreditation

Partial implementation of recommendations

13. In 2012, a letter with a copy of a bill on the establishment and organization of the Commission was transmitted to the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions informing it of the existence of the Commission in Gabon. The Committee then suggested amendments to this new bill. On 31 October 2013, advocacy work was done in partnership with the Francophone Association of National Human Rights Commissions (AFCNDH) with the national institutions of Gabon, including the Economic and Social Council. These advocacy efforts led to the establishment of the current headquarters of the National Human Rights Commission.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

14. The parliament is at the final stage of passing once and for all the amended bill on the establishment and organization of the Commission.

E. Collaboration between civil society and government institutions

Mechanisms for ongoing consultation and increased dialogue with civil society

Full implementation of the recommendations

15. In 2010, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Government set up two networks for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, namely the National Network for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Gabon (REPEG) and the National Network for the Promotion of the Rights of the Child in Gabon (RESPEG). Since 2013, the Government has been working in collaboration with these two networks. On 3 December 2014, a national forum on the rights of the child was held in Libreville, which gave the Government, UNICEF and civil society an opportunity to come up with a platform for discussion and dialogue about children's rights issues. On 13 May

2015, a seminar on capacity-building at the forum was organized in Libreville, at which a national plan for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child was devised. On 25 and 26 June 2015, the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa in Libreville organized consultations between the Government and civil society organizations. The main objective was to provide Gabon with technical support for the establishment of a participatory and standing coordinating body.

Recommendation in the process of implementation

16. Gabon is in the process of establishing a national participatory and standing coordinating body.

F. Awareness-raising activities

Good practices for human rights on the part of civil society and the State

Full implementation of the recommendations

17. The Government regularly takes on civil society actors as partners in human rights awareness-raising activities and capacity-building among the population. Since 2012, teams from the Solidarity Action and Development Movement (MSAD) have travelled every corner of Port-Gentil to conduct inquiries into cases of persons without birth certificates, particularly children of school age. Having worked with the administrative authorities and local elected officials, the Movement has helped arrange for 150 of the children surveyed to obtain a birth certificate. Furthermore, with technical support from the non-governmental organization (NGO) SIFOS and in partnership with UNICEF, the Government organized a training seminar for young peer educators from various educational institutions on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 19 and 20 March 2014 in Libreville in order to remind them of their rights and duties. Moreover, a campaign mounted by the Government and UNICEF to raise awareness about the importance of birth certificates and the procedures for obtaining them was launched on 3 October 2014 and drew to a close on 27 October 2014 with a meeting for members of the judiciary. A multisector framework for providing a solution to the problem of children and families left vulnerable by the lack of a birth certificate, this campaign was of some consequence. On 16 December 2014, the Government, UNICEF and Child Helpline International organized an information and training workshop in Libreville for the purpose of setting up a helpline for vulnerable children and young people. A civic education road show entitled "Preventing and combating immorality in Gabon" toured the main towns of the provinces and departments. For six months, a multidisciplinary team from the Ministry of Culture (outreach workers, psychologists, sociologists etc.), supported by local specialists (doctors, judges etc.) gained acceptance and support from the people, through educational talks, lectures and debates and other forms of discussion at the local community level, for efforts to combat the following social ills: alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse; child sexual abuse; voluntary transmission of HIV/AIDS by infected persons; a propensity to indulge in improper and high-risk sexual behaviours; teachers having sex with their students in exchange for higher marks; displays of ignorance or rejection of the law and rules governing social and family life; and acts of rape against minors, which require greater exposure and public awareness, etc.

G. Cooperation between Gabon and the agencies of the United Nations system

Involvement of the international community in efforts to promote and protect human rights

Full implementation of the recommendations

18. Aside from action taken in connection with the specific recommendations involving cooperation between Gabon and the international community elaborated on in this report, Gabon has taken a number of measures in partnership with UNICEF. Within the framework

of cooperation between the Government and UNICEF for the period 2012-2017, there has been capacity-building, in the area of the judicial protection of children in conflict with the law and victims of trafficking in persons, for 376 magistrates, 49 clerks of the court and 320 prison security agents, in the military sphere, for 1,008 gendarmes, 879 police officers and 98 army personnel and, in the social sphere, for 228 social workers and 429 members of civil society organizations. Particular emphasis has been placed on raising awareness about international agreements on children, including among 120 deputies, 98 senators, 36 officers of the parliamentary administration, 56 mayors, 105 heads of educational establishments, 202 assistant heads, 615 teachers, 26 educational advisers, 396 supervisors, 4,495 pupils, 376 students, 129 religious leaders and 49 community radio managers. As far as cooperation between Gabon and United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa is concerned, training and awareness-raising seminars were organized for State actors, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, private companies, political parties, media outlets and human rights coordinating bodies at the local level. These training sessions took into account vulnerable populations in the electoral process and human rights in business enterprises, among other issues. Between 22 and 25 April 2014, a seminar focused on the following human rights issues: the promotion and protection of human rights and the role of auxiliary actors; appeals to legislators for legislative reforms in the area of non-discrimination; human rights and business enterprises; and the role of human rights defenders and advocates. As regards cooperation between the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), on 10 December 2016, police and gendarmes were trained in international mechanisms applicable in periods of crisis and judicial or administrative proceedings. Within the framework of the Gabon-United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) cooperation programme for the period 2012-2016, priority was given to the social reintegration of vulnerable girls through training, income-generating activities and the supply of start-up equipment for such activities. The training provided to some 40 girls sought to empower them.

H. Torture

Establishment of an independent national mechanism for the prevention of torture

Partial implementation of recommendations

19. The Government signed a partnership agreement with the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) in order to receive support for the establishment of a national preventive mechanism. The partnership has resulted in the development of a bill for the establishment and running of a national authority for the prevention of torture and the organization of a national workshop to endorse the bill in June 2015. The workshop received support from APT and the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. A road map was then developed with a view to putting in place a national mechanism for the prevention of torture.

Recommendation in the process of implementation

20. Gabon is in the process of establishing a national mechanism for the prevention of torture.

I. Corporal punishment

National strategy and public awareness

Full implementation of the recommendations

21. On 27 January 2014, a seminar to build the capacity of State agents in educational settings with a focus on violence against children was held in Tchibanga under the auspices of the Directorate General for Human Rights. Under this initiative, heads of secondary education establishments, deputy heads, supervisors, social workers and nursing staff have been given the necessary tools inherent in international human rights instruments. A

capacity-building seminar on respect for the rights of the child was organized on 31 January 2014 in Mouila for persons working in the education sector. The Directorate General for Human Rights assisted the Directorate General for Education of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church of Gabon in training its teachers, pastors and instructors in efforts to combat violence in its many forms, including corporal punishment. This work was done on 6 and 7 January in Libreville and then from 9 to 11 January 2016 in Tchibanga. Following the completion of a report on violence against children in Gabon in 2010, a comprehensive national system for the protection of the child came into being. This involves a response mechanism for mobilizing all public and private stakeholders involved with children in a holistic manner regardless of the challenge being addressed. From February to March 2014, the Directorate General for Human Rights conducted an awareness and poster campaign in police stations, gendarmeries and other places of detention concerning the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. The Government held a capacity-building seminar from 29 November to 3 December 2016 for prison governors in the provinces and heads of clerk's offices dealing with the protection of children in conflict with the law, and the elimination of corporal punishment in prisons featured prominently in the seminar.

J. Right to health

Guarantees of health for all

Full implementation of the recommendations

22. The commitment to uphold the right to health for all has led to the development and adoption of a national health policy, finalization of the National Health Development Plan for the period 2011-2015 and wider implementation of the National Health Insurance and Social Protection Fund. By establishing a national health insurance scheme for all, the Government has sought to provide an innovative response to the difficulties that people face in gaining access to decent health-care services. As at 22 September 2014, 799,023 persons had already been registered with the Fund. With a target population estimated at 1.2 million persons, the overall coverage rate is some 66.58 per cent. Members of socioeconomic groups previously without coverage, such as self-employed and domestic workers, have also joined the Fund. As regards persons employed in the informal sector, estimated at some 300,000 persons, the Fund is in the process of reviewing mechanisms to provide them with care, with technical assistance from international organizations such as the World Bank. Among the most important measures taken by the Head of State following the Social Conference of Gabon (Assises sociales du Gabon) held in Libreville in April 2014 was to step up the registration of such disadvantaged persons throughout the country.

Allocation of resources for the health-care system

Full implementation of the recommendations

23. According to the preliminary results of the national health accounts for 2012 and 2013, published in July 2015, total expenditure on health has risen since 2011, reaching nearly 339 billion CFA francs in 2013, or 3.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 11 per cent of government expenditure; expenditure on health-care coverage from the Fund stood at 12.8 billion CFA francs in 2014 and is increasing year on year.

Combating epidemics

Full implementation of the recommendations

24. It should be noted that the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Lambaréné specializes in malaria vaccine research and development. A national strategic plan to combat HIV for the period 2012-2016 that incorporates gender and human rights perspectives has also been developed. The Directorate General for the Prevention of AIDS, in collaboration with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), organized a training seminar in October 2013 for peer educators working with young HIV-positive people, NGOs and

HIV/AIDS organizations. A report on the People Living with HIV Stigma Index and discrimination study, prepared by the Directorate General for the Prevention of AIDS in collaboration with the Gabonese Network of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS and UNICEF, was approved in August 2013. It contains a database that is used as an advocacy tool intended to provide resources to persons living with HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS organizations and networks to measure progress made or to be made on observance of the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS and changes in policies, laws, programmes and practices. Under the auspices of the AIDS Prevention Committee of the Ministry of Education, a training seminar attended by students from the Teacher Training College of Franceville was held in December 2013 with the objective of providing teacher trainees with specific help in teaching about HIV/AIDS at the pre-primary and primary school levels. Participants in the seminar were offered an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the state of the HIV epidemic, sexually transmitted diseases, relevant communication tools, the stigma that thwarts young people living with HIV or associated with people living with HIV from succeeding in school, teaching strategies, health information clubs as instruments of HIV/AIDs protection and other themes. The Committee formed health information clubs in March 2014 in certain secondary schools (in Ntoum and Kango) to raise awareness about high-risk attitudes and behaviours involving HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The seminar aimed at promoting the rights of young persons and adolescents to information, education and sexual and reproductive health and the prevention of new HIV infections among students. It paved the way for 39 peer educators and 7 trainers to take ownership of the fight against HIV/AIDS in their educational establishments. On the legal level, the Council of Ministers adopted a draft decree on 23 December 2014 on the establishment, terms of reference and organization of the programme to combat sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS in the military. The programme aims at coordinating efforts to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. The Government has authorized the introduction of a vaccination against HIV infections.

Access to basic health-care services

Full implementation of the recommendations

25. Five next generation university hospital centres have been built, in Libreville, Owendo and Angondjè, and the Jeanne Ebori centre in Libreville, specializing particularly in maternal and child health. The Alice House, which provides medical and psychosocial support to persons who have contracted cancer, is up and running. Between 14 and 21 December 2014, key players in the field of medicine met in Libreville to review the list of medicines eligible for reimbursement by the national insurance scheme with a view to improving the treatment of patients by offering a wide array of molecules covering all the existing diseases in the country and known to be effective. The new list takes into account treatments for the most common diseases such as malaria, diabetes and high blood pressure but also life-threatening diseases such as cancer and hepatitis and rare diseases requiring costly treatment such as lupus and kidney failure. When it comes to generic drugs, the list of medicines reimbursed by the Fund grew by 12 per cent (102 items) in 2009, 18 per cent (224) in 2011 and 22 per cent (408) in 2013. Proprietary drugs, for their part, went from 88 per cent (733) in 2009 to 82 per cent (1,027) in 2011 and 78 per cent (1,446) in 2013. The national insurance scheme fully covers cancer treatment. Such care involves the distribution of medicines through a mechanism coordinated by the National Health Insurance and Social Protection Fund and the Cancer Treatment Institute of Angondjè. It extends to medical examinations in facilities approved by the Fund. In 2013, 400 persons were treated in the Institute in Angondjè. Cancer treatment, like haemodialysis, is fully covered by the Fund. All persons living with HIV have access to free antiretroviral treatment and all HIV-positive pregnant women to free prenatal care and delivery services. HIV screening and laboratory tests and treatments for opportunistic infections are covered by the national health insurance scheme. As far as the undertaking to reimburse medical expenses is concerned, due regard is had for the new World Health Organization guidelines on antiretroviral therapy. Regarding regulations governing health service delivery, emphasis has been placed on integrating HIV services into various health facilities rather than limiting them to specialized facilities such as outpatient centres.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

26. During the political dialogue held in May 2017, which brought together the majority political parties, the opposition and civil society, the Government was called on to take the following steps: post specialist doctors to all the main towns in the provinces and general practitioners to the main towns of the departments, providing them with incentives (technical capacity, housing, transport, bonuses and others); continue to enrol disadvantaged persons in the national health insurance scheme; ensure that home care for persons with physical disabilities and persons with chronic illnesses are covered by the Fund; make available essential medicines and medical devices; develop mobile clinics to reach the greatest number of people possible; promote health throughout people's lifetimes; and combat the still high levels of maternal and infant mortality.

K. Right to education

Dropout, failure and fall in school attendance

Full implementation of the recommendations

27. The principle of non-discrimination enshrined in the Constitution has been strengthened by decree No. 103/PR on the promulgation of Act No. 21/2011 of 14 January 2012 establishing general guidelines for education, training and research. Articles 104 and 105 confer on deserving pupils and students the right to education, including the provision by the State of the most appropriate environment for learning and growing possible. In order to achieve this objective, the State established the National Agency of Scholarships and Work Experience under decree No. 404/PR/MENESTFPRSCIS of 26 September 2012. In 2016, the Government carried out two studies, one on school dropout and the other on the prevention and handling of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and adolescent pregnancy. The studies will help ensure that adolescents are provided with a protective environment so that they may fully enjoy their right to education or training. Since the 2011/12 academic year, the Government has provided health-care coverage for the students enrolled in the country. For the 2013/14 school year, 20,521 students were registered. With a view to increasing capacities to accommodate students in higher education, the Government has built new lecture halls at the National Higher School for Technical Education and the University of Health Sciences and a new Omar Bongo Technical School. In September 2013, the Ministry of National Education took delivery of 1.24 million primary school textbooks and 86,050 secondary school textbooks, or twice the number of textbooks produced in the 2012/13 academic year. Furthermore, the Government has produced two guides on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, which will soon be rolled out in schools. One is general in nature, as it concerns the rights of the child as regards education in vocational schools, and the other is more focused, as it seeks to promote sexual and reproductive health in biology courses (*sciences et vie de la terre*). Some 600 classrooms were built between 2010 and 2016. A total 2,407 teachers were recruited and put on the payroll owing to the timely and coordinated efforts of the Ministry of National Education, Ministry of the Civil Service and Ministry of the Budget and Public Accounts. In addition, 170,000 study benches have been ordered and are being manufactured in Olam (Gabon) to meet the need for 118,620 desks. An extra four manufacturing units from Nkok (special economic zone) have helped increase the pace of production, which stood at 400 desks per week because of the conditions for transporting, drying and cutting wood. Deliveries have gradually been made to schools in Libreville and throughout the country since 24 February 2017.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

28. During the above-mentioned political dialogue, majority political parties, opposition parties and civil society drew the Government's attention to the need to reform school curricula for the following: to give students the skills needed to enter the labour market; to introduce apprenticeships under cooperative education contracts and work placements in order to improve young people's employment prospects, develop their professional skills and identify the best competency profiles; to promote self-employment among young

people by funding their training in technical areas through six-month immersion programmes in business enterprises; to restructure and give a seal of approval to the "One youth = one trade" programme; to build in every district and town business incubators at the community level to support the "One youth = one trade" programme; to continue to organize the school system into educational areas and uphold standard student-teacher ratios; and to promote public-private partnerships to build modern infrastructure (including boarding schools) and provide schools with proper equipment.

L. Poverty

Intensification or continuation of the fight against poverty

Full implementation of the recommendations

29. The system for the allocation and management of social safety nets was reconfigured into two new government agencies: the National Health Insurance and Social Protection Fund, established in 2007; and the National Social Assistance Fund, established in 2012. One of the main innovations to be introduced was the gradual implementation of social protection measures for the most disadvantaged populations. The system is based on the third-party payment system, with insured persons responsible only for making a co-payment of 20 per cent to cover the cost of treating common medical conditions and 10 per cent for major illnesses. Pregnant women are fully covered. A member of the "economically disadvantaged population in Gabon", referred to as GEF (*Gabonais économiquement faibles*), means a Gabonese national more than 16 years of age with an income less than the guaranteed minimum wage (80,000 CFA francs in 2008). The Fund took over the management of health insurance for private sector workers in 2014. In 2014, 483,865 members of the economically disadvantaged population were covered by the Fund (as opposed to 431,117 in late 2012). Disadvantaged persons registered with the Fund are also entitled to have access to public meters that allow them to cover the costs of their use of water and electricity. Such persons are entitled to family benefits comprising the following: a baby bonus in kind, in the form of baby clothes worth 50,000 CFA francs; a monthly allowance of 5,000 CFA francs for each child up to the age of 21 years, subject to the presentation of a medical certificate or certificate of school enrolment; and a back-to-school allowance of 5,000 CFA francs per child, subject to a school enrolment certificate; this allowance is currently being reassessed. Schoolchildren have the right to an annual sum of 158,500 CFA francs in family and back-to-school allowances if they are the children of State employees, as opposed to 104,000 CFA francs if they are the children of private sector workers and 53,000 CFA francs if they are from the economically disadvantaged population. Pursuant to amendments to the law on compulsory schooling, the back-to-school allowance was extended to children enrolled in preschool, but only persons employed in the private sector benefit from it if they have children aged between 3 and 5. In addition to the benefits specifically designed for them, the economically disadvantaged persons enjoy certain forms of aid granted to all Gabonese citizens, such as school grants of up to 24,000 CFA francs per quarter for every child enrolled in secondary school, 83,000 CFA francs per month for the first and second year of higher education (bachelor's degree) and 98,000 CFA francs for the final years (master's degree) for every student who obtained a school leaving certificate (*baccalauréat*). The Government increased the average minimum income for public officials to 150,000 CFA francs and has decided to raise their transport allowance to 35,000 along with housing assistance. Destitute widows and orphaned children, single mothers, persons with disabilities and older disadvantaged persons enjoy specific financial and practical support from the Fund to cover co-payments in public health centres and burials and the delivery of regular food aid in kind. As regards the housing policy, the Council of Ministers made it easier to have access to landownership, with the streamlining of procedures from 134 steps to 7. The President issued Decree No. 0005/PR of 13 February 2012 establishing a new system of landownership in Gabon. In January 2012, landownership assistance allowances for civil servants increased from 75,000 CFA francs to 150,000 for staff classified in category A, from 45,000 to 75,000 in category B and from 17,000 to 50,000 in category C. In 2016, several hundred units of social housing were provided to eligible persons, subject to a transparent selection

procedure, in Angondjé, a suburb of Libreville. The National Social Assistance Fund constitutes one of the major reforms carried out in the social sector. Established pursuant to Decree No. 00252/PR/MIFAS of 19 June 2012 on the system for the implementation of social assistance and family protection, the Fund is the executive body for carrying out the Government's public social assistance policy. Administratively and financially independent, the body is responsible for funding small business projects in some sectors considered to be a priority for boosting the economy, including agriculture, fisheries, livestock, handicrafts and tourism. It has been given a mandate to provide support to vulnerable and unemployed populations, especially young people. With a budget of 5 billion CFA francs, it has become a cornerstone of the social covenant promoted by the Government, and it focuses its efforts on promoting income-generating activities. Since its establishment, more than 6,900 beneficiaries (disadvantaged persons and persons with disabilities) have received financial assistance; 5,000 have received school supplies kits; more than 800 have received indirect assistance in the area of education (school fees, vocational training assistance and citizenship education assistance); and several beneficiaries have received health, housing, disaster and survivor assistance. To respond to the various concerns of Gabonese citizens, a draft national social protection policy was funded in 2013, with backing from technical and financial partners and UNICEF. With a view to making a transition from social assistance to a human investment strategy, Gabon commissioned a study on poverty from the British consulting firm McKinsey in order to set conditions for assistance, promote income-generating activities, close the gaps in access to social services and carry out a targeted public works policy. The Social Conference of Gabon was then held on 25 and 26 April 2014 in order to consider ways of reducing poverty and unemployment, which laid the groundwork for the implementation of a strategy for the investment of human resources in Gabon through the following: a plan of action based on the establishment of networks for the economic protection and transfer of social funds to the most disadvantaged populations; support for the development of income-generating activities in order to empower vulnerable households; and a reduction in inequalities in access to social and public services and further economic and social integration (opening up) of pockets of poverty in rural and outlying urban areas (rehabilitation of housing and increased mobility and connectivity). The estimated cost of implementing this strategy is between 80 billion and 100 billion CFA francs per year, 35 to 50 per cent of which are included in the plans of the ministries concerned. The following additional measures help to support the fight against poverty: full coverage of the most vulnerable families according to a social survey (including a card from the National Health Insurance and Social Protection Fund to facilitate their care); standardization of reimbursement for all generic drugs up to at least 80 per cent; full coverage of emergency medical costs, for the first 24 hours, in life-threatening situations for all Gabonese citizens, regardless of whether or not they are insured; coverage of private sector workers by the Fund since 1 June 2014; intensification by the Fund of registration campaigns among the economically disadvantaged populations; issuance, free of charge, of residence certificates required by the Fund for the registration of those populations; payment of family allowances to State employees by budget and public accounts services on the basis of a file provided by the Fund in order to encourage public servants to enrol their children in health insurance and to avoid false claims, since the first quarter of 2014; gradual increase in family allowances for economically disadvantaged populations since June 2014, from 4,000 to 5,000 CFA francs per child per month; reorganization of the National Employment Office to increase human resources by recruiting 1,000 officers for the medium term; strengthening of the Integration and Reintegration Fund in the amount of 10 billion CFA francs; establishment of apprenticeship contracts to facilitate work/study programmes so that young people may gain direct experience in business enterprises; and adoption of a draft decree to amend or abolish certain provisions of Act No. 001/2003 on the general civil service regulations in order to put in place a new system of remuneration for civil servants, now in force. The new pay system now includes a renewed emphasis on basic salaries and greater fringe benefits and personal merit as the main factor for career development and higher pay. The lowest salaries have been increased. Progress has been made towards the future increase in the level of pensions of civil servants and other State officials entitled to retirement benefits.

M. Training of the defence and security forces

Training of the defence and security forces

Full implementation of the recommendations

30. From 15 to 17 June 2013, in collaboration with UNICEF, the Government organized a capacity-building seminar for police investigators and prison guards concerning the national regulatory framework for the protection of the rights of the child. The seminar included training sessions on child trafficking and exploitation on the theme "Social dialogue and mastery of the regulatory framework for the protection of children". With a view to building capacity to fight transborder crime in Central Africa, the Government met with police officers, gendarmes and customs officials responsible for enforcing the law in Libreville in February 2014. From 22 to 26 September 2014, the Government organized an expert conference on the protection of minors in places of detention for officials responsible for this issue in order to raise awareness about the international and national regulatory frameworks for the protection of children in conflict with the law and adopt a standard national model and systematic approach to caring for them.

N. Women's rights

Women's empowerment

Full implementation of the recommendations

31. Under the Gabon-UNFPA cooperation programme for the period 2012-2016, in addition to the training and rehabilitation of vulnerable girls and the setting up of income-generating activities, a workshop on empowerment for some 40 girls was organized. For the implementation of the project on human security, led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the NGO Agir pour le genre (Action for Gender) organized a training session in August 2013 for 40 women refugees in Gabon in order to help them become self-reliant and make them less vulnerable, and they have received grants in support of their empowerment and implementation of their projects. On 4 July 2015, the National Network for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Gabon held an event to raise women's awareness about the regulations governing business start-ups and the collection and transmission of information on the development of the private sector. In 2016, the National Social Assistance Fund helped 200 women to carry out income-generating activities.

Implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Equity

Full implementation of the recommendations

32. The principle of non-discrimination is established in the Constitution. Gender equality is guaranteed under Act No. 09/2015 of 5 September 2016 setting quotas on women's access to senior civil service posts and Act No. 010/2016 of 5 September 2016 on combating harassment in the workplace. Gabon has policy papers for the promotion and protection of the rights of women in such areas as the fight against HIV/AIDS, maternal care and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In order to incorporate gender into the strategic plan on AIDS for the period 2013-2017 in accordance with the National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity, a workshop to assess the level of attention given to the gender dimension of the national response to HIV was organized on 1 October 2013 in Libreville. In February 2015, UNDP made a commitment to supporting the human investment strategy of Gabon through income generation activities for vulnerable women.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

33. During the political dialogue that brought together the political parties from the majority, the opposition and civil society, important measures that were worked out by consensus would soon be implemented by both the Government and the parliament. First of

all, the principle of equality between men and women under the basic law was affirmed. Article 24 of the Constitution would be amended to read: "The law encourages the equal access of women and men to elected office and professional positions." Furthermore, article 6 of the Constitution will be amended as follows: "Political parties and groups are to contribute towards equal access of women and men to elected office." It was also decided to guarantee women's access to leading positions in the local administration in accordance with Act No. 009/2006 of 5 September 2016 establishing quotas for access of women and young people to political elections and women's access to senior civil service posts. Lastly, it was decided to transform the Women's Rights Observatory into the National Women's Council (CONAFEM), an instrument to help the Government make decisions on the promotion and protection of women's rights and a lever of democracy responsible for promoting women's full participation in public life.

Elimination of discriminatory customs and traditions

Full implementation of the recommendations

34. As a result of the study conducted by Gabon and UNFPA on forms of violence and forced marriages (indicating that, in 2012, 22 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 had been married before the age of 18, versus 34 per cent in 2000, and 6 per cent had been married before the age of 15, versus 11 per cent in 2011), Gabon built the capacity of 120 actors (75 women and 45 men) responsible for dealing with gender-based violence and put in place a platform for these actors, including gendarmes, police officers, medical professionals, social workers, NGOs, prosecutors and representatives of various faiths. The bill to amend certain articles of the Civil Code seeks to give polygamy more attention in order to provide for the equal division of property left by deceased husbands. Such provisions would help prevent women in such unions from becoming dispossessed and protect widows and orphaned children. Within the framework of cooperation between Gabon and UNICEF, a government road show put on in Lambaréné to combat child abuse has heightened awareness of the issue among 5,000 Christian women, 1,000 young representatives from nine provinces, civil and military authorities, judges, psychologists, police investigators, prominent community figures and religious leaders. Public talks aimed at combating violence against children in the home were held in Libreville and Tchibanga. On 4 September 2014, with support from the United States Embassy and in partnership with the NGO A Woman's Cry, the Government inaugurated the Issiemanu Centre in Libreville, a place for women to break the silence on the domestic violence, emotional and sexual abuse and dispossession they are forced to endure. With regard to economic violence, the Government seized the opportunity of International Women's Day in 2014 to raise national awareness about this scourge, as, in 2013, 192 cases of economic violence involving 142 cases of women and girls who were the victims of non-payment of alimony, 40 cases of child abandonment and 10 cases of spousal abandonment were registered.

O. Birth certificates

Measures for easy and effective access

Full implementation of the recommendations

35. In addition to the developments referred to in section F of this report on the measures to heighten awareness about birth certificates, in 2013 and 2014, the Government had institutions responsible for issuing birth certificates adopt a sectoral plan that included national guidelines for entering records in the civil registry. Awareness and training seminars were organized for civil registry officials (mayors, prefects and sub-prefects), health workers in maternity homes, cantonal secretaries, local leaders and administrative officials, members of civil society, the judiciary and the people. Currently, vigorous special efforts are currently being made to raise public awareness about the situation of children without birth certificates. Today, Gabon has a sectoral plan of action and national strategy to register births.

P. Ritual crimes

Legislative and judicial measures implemented

Full implementation of the recommendations

86. Between 2011 and 2012, 78 cases involving murder and similar crimes were tried by the courts in Libreville, Oyem, Lambaréné, Franceville, Mouila and Port-Gentil. On 20 April 2013, while making clear his determination to combat such crimes, the President instructed the Minister of Justice to organize special criminal session in order to punish the instigators and perpetrators of such offences.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

87. In October 2014, a bill providing for mandatory sentencing of 30 years was presented by the President of the National Assembly and is now being voted on. Under the bill to amend the Criminal Code currently before the parliament, the offence of removing human organs is expressly defined and subject to penalties. The Children's Code, under consideration by the Council of State, increased the criminal penalties for so-called ritual crimes by finding them to be offences for which there is no statute of limitations and affirming that no amnesty may be granted to offenders.

Awareness-raising measures

Full implementation of the recommendations

88. On 20 April 2013, the President called a meeting of several key players in the fight against murder and other similar crimes and instructed the chiefs of police and the gendarmerie to do everything possible to restore security to cities and villages without delay.

Q. Conditions of detention

Improvement of conditions of detention

Full implementation of the recommendations

89. In November 2013, a national campaign of vaccinations against yellow fever, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, meningitis and hepatitis B was launched at the prison in Port-Gentil, which were given to more than 200 voluntary prisoners. That same year, a commission made up of magistrates and prison security agents reviewed the files of inmates held in the prison while awaiting sentencing in order to resolve the issue of overcrowding. On 6 March 2014, the Bar Association of Gabon met with the Commander-in-Chief of Prison Security so that the two parties could review the treatment of inmates and make suggestions on ways to improve their quality of life. Lastly, on 19 March 2014, the Bar met with Staff Headquarters of the National Police to ensure proper handling, treatment and conditions of detention during police custody.

R. Juvenile justice

Enforcement of the law on young people

Full implementation of the recommendations

90. Between 22 and 26 September 2014, a Government-UNICEF seminar on the specialized field of protecting young people in prisons was organized for prison security agents working in the country's nine provinces. The seminar took stock of the outcomes of the seminars in 2013, which focused on the international and national regulatory framework for the protection of children in conflict with the law, the establishment of a standard national model and the taking of a systemic approach to caring for them. In an order signed

on 15 July 2014, the Minister of Justice set forth measures to prepare for the social reintegration of prisoners through work, education and training. Officials at the central prison of Port-Gentil then introduced market gardening activities involving a wide range of fresh produce grown by inmates, with support from the National Institute for Development Support.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

41. Currently, in other prisons, similar projects for the reintegration of inmates are being carried out involving, for example, car wash, auto repair or bricklaying work.

S. Trafficking in persons

Combating human trafficking

Full implementation of the recommendations

42. In the performance of their duties and under the supervision of the public prosecutor, the security forces and labour inspectors are under instructions to take in charge any child under the age of 16 found in conditions of exploitation. On 22 May 2013, the Directorate General for Human Rights conducted an awareness-raising event for children at the Angondjé reception centre who had been victims of trafficking, enslaved or exploited as beggars or child labourers. They were taught that they should report any ill-treatment that they suffered by the police or any other persons pretending to help them. Between 2014 and 2015, the Monitoring Committee on Measures to Combat Child Trafficking made a list of more than 750 girls and boys freed from trafficking rings and reintegrated locally or repatriated to their countries of origin (Benin, Togo and Nigeria). Once identified and liberated from the networks or families exploiting them, the children are temporarily placed in a social care centre in Angondjé. The cost of their repatriation is covered by the networks or families exploiting them, and they are transferred through UNICEF to their countries of origin. Where such networks or families cannot cover the costs of returning the children, they are shared with the Governments of the countries of origin; the refusal of those Governments to bear the costs leads to the de facto extension of the victims stay in the Angondjé centre. The Children's Code provides for criminal penalties for all offences against children, including those relating to trafficking. Gabon has a sectoral plan and a national strategy on trafficking in children.

T. Rights of persons with disabilities

Strengthening the rights of persons with disabilities

Full implementation of the recommendations

43. The Government has introduced a policy to combat social inequalities through integration programmes supported by socially aware companies. Since 2014, companies such as Bolloré, AfricaLogistics, Mbolo, CFAO Motors, Gabon Energy and Water Corporation (SEEG) and Prix import have become renowned for their efforts to employ persons with disabilities. These companies have complied with article 182 of the Labour Code concerning the employment of persons with disabilities by recruiting such persons. One company, SEEG, has opened its vocational training centre to 80 young persons, including 10 persons with disabilities. Inaugurated on 1 October 2014, the Albertine Amissa Bongo Reception Centre, which specializes in the rehabilitation of children with mental disabilities, cares for children who are stigmatized and shunned by their families. The Centre admits children with Down's syndrome, autism and intellectual disabilities to teach them to develop their potential through educational programmes that take into account their disabilities. In 2013, some 4,532 persons with disabilities received ongoing support from an empowerment fund amounting to 200 million CFA francs for the creation of income generating activities set up by the Government. In 2014, 5,471 beneficiaries were registered for such support in addition to the technical assistance provided to them to

facilitate mobility. The law establishing guidelines for the policy to care for and protect persons with mental disabilities was adopted by the parliament in 2016.

Recommendations in the process of implementation

44. Under the Human Investment Strategy, there exists a social safety net programme for the integration of persons with disabilities and a project for the construction of specialized centres for persons with disabilities.

U. Freedom of the press and expression

Creation of an enabling environment for a free and open press

Full implementation of the recommendations

45. On 11 June 2013, a commission tasked with assessing the situation of journalists in Gabon was established. On 2 October 2013, it submitted its conclusions and work to the Chair of the National Media Council. While the conclusions brought to light shortcomings and irregularities in the profession, they also aimed at improving the image of the press, providing for training and further training of journalists and reforming the living and working conditions of members of the press.

Procedures relating to complaints against the press, legislative and other measures guaranteeing freedom of the press and the independence of journalists and decriminalization of press offences

Full implementation of the recommendations

46. In addition to the Charter on the Rights and Duties of Journalists, another important instrument, a new Media Code, has been drafted. Created to meet the expectations of members of the media, Government and the people, this instrument, promulgated in August 2016, reaffirms the prohibition against any form of censorship and the principles of freedom of the press and the protection of sources. Taking into account online media and the national film industry, the Code states that "no journalists may be made to go to prison because of their writings except in cases of subsequent offences". The new Media Code was, as usual, sent backwards and forwards between the Government, the Council of State and the parliament and entered into force in January 2017.

Right to peaceful assembly

Full implementation of the recommendations

47. Having the status of constitutional law since 28 February 1992, the preamble to the Constitution includes key guiding principles such as freedom of peaceful assembly. Gabon recognizes and guarantees this inviolable and inalienable right, as it does other such rights. This freedom carries with it duties and responsibilities and is subject to limitations, conditions, restrictions and penalties as are provided for by law and are necessary to protect national security, public safety and public order.

Neutrality of the National Media Council

Recommendations in the process of implementation

48. Among the major decisions to be made at the political dialogue in May 2017 was the decision to separate the Council from the constitutional institutions in order to transform it into a regulatory authority with the legal status of independent administrative authority, for which the formalities are now being completed. The manner in which members are appointed has also been revised, as follows: three members by the President, including two from the trade association; three by the parliament, including two from the trade association; and three by professionals from the sector, including one from the press, one

from radio and television and one from the film industry. The members of the new Council are appointed for a non-renewable term of five years.

V. Rights of minorities

Guarantee and protection without discrimination of the rights of minorities, improvement of their access to birth certificates and guarantee of their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights

Full implementation of the recommendations

49. In August 2013, indigenous populations (Pygmies) from the villages Benguia, Moulendé and Mvengué and the province of Haut-Ogooué received replacement birth certificates from the Secretary General of the province and from the prefect of the department of Mpassa. In September 2013, other indigenous populations from other provinces received theirs under the same conditions. In order to uphold the economic, social and cultural rights of indigenous populations, in November 2013, the Minister of Water and Forests and management companies signed the first community forest management agreement, which serves as a tool to combat poverty in rural areas. The agreement will help to foster local development by reorganizing the running of village communities as far as national resource management and the expansion of income generating activities offering alternatives to the timber business are concerned.

W. Assessment and outlook

50. A number of amendments to the law have been introduced in Gabon in the past 10 years aimed at bringing national legislation into line with several United Nations human rights instruments, including the introduction of the Children's Code.

51. In terms of future prospects, Gabon is actively involved in the following:

- Creation of a permanent, integrated, national structure for combating trafficking in persons
- Creation of a parliamentary select committee on the protection of persons, especially women and children
- Signature and implementation of bilateral cooperation agreements with countries that are the source of trafficking in persons
- Adoption by the Government of a draft national policy on social protection, finalized in 2013
- Dissemination of new regulatory and legislative measures aimed at protecting widows and orphaned children
- Vote by the parliament on a bill providing for penalties against perpetrators of ritual crimes
- Enactment of a bill amending the Criminal Code
- Adoption of the Children's Code
- Adoption of the new law on the organization and functioning of the National Human Rights Commission
- Implementation by the Government and the parliament of the outcomes from the political dialogue in 2017, including the new status of the National Media Council, health and social protection measures taken to promote greater equality between men and women, measures to improve education, training and employment and measures to boost economic development